

PART I INTRODUCTION

LOCATION AND SETTING

This management plan covers the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails on the public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the State of Wyoming. The trails are located in the Platte River Resource Area of the Casper District, the Lander Resource Area of the Rawlins District, and the Pinedale, Big Sandy, and Kemmerer Resource Areas of the Rock Springs District.

The trail routes across the State of Wyoming are shown on Map 1. The trail route follows the North Platte River through most of the Casper District. It follows the Sweetwater River nearly to South Pass in the Rawlins District. In the Rock Springs District, the corridor divides with individual routes and cutoffs leading west, northwest, and southwest through Fremont, Sublette, Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Uinta counties.

The land ownership pattern along the trail is diverse. In the eastern part of the state, little of the trails are on public lands. In the western part of the state long stretches of the primary trail routes and major trail alternatives are on public lands.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

National Historic Trail Designation

In November 1978, with the passage of an amendment (Public Law 95-625) to the National Trail System Act (Public Law 90-543), the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer Trails were designated as National Historic Trails by Congress. The National Historic Trails System Act, as amended, places responsibility for administering the trails with the Secretary of the Interior.

The purpose of National Historic Trail designation is to identify and protect the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer Trails, along with their historic remnants and artifacts, for public use and enjoyment. The National Trail System Act also directs the Secretary of the Interior to prepare comprehensive management plans and to adopt uniform markers for both trails.

In April of 1983, an interagency agreement between the Rocky Mountain Region of the National Park Service and the Wyoming BLM was completed. The purpose of the agreement is to provide the basis for cooperation between NPS and BLM to implement the comprehensive plan for the Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail.

National Park Service Responsibilities

The National Park Service was delegated the responsibility by the Secretary of the Interior to complete comprehensive management plans for both of the trails. The plans for both trails were completed in 1981. Both are so-called "umbrella" plans which provide general management direction for the entire length of the trails.

The National Park Service has the overall responsibility to administer the trails and to play a continuing oversight and assistance role for the various interests involved with trail management. Those interests include private landowners, state governments, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Specific National Park Service responsibilities related to BLM management of the trails are as follows:

1. Encouraging and assisting in the implementation of the recommendations for the trails as identified in the comprehensive plans;
2. Encouraging and assisting the BLM to enter into cooperative agreements with state or local agencies, private landowners, and private organizations or individuals for the protection and interpretation of portions of the two National Historic Trails, either within or outside federally administered areas;
3. Reviewing all detailed management and use plans prepared by the BLM for sites and segments of the trails. Those plans will be reviewed to assure that they conform generally with the intent of legislation and with the concepts and guidelines in the National Park Service Comprehensive Plans;
4. Promulgating and issuing regulations which have general application along the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails;

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5. Encouraging, performing, or arranging for historical and archaeological research; and
6. Arranging for the availability of maps, reports, books, brochures, and other interpretive publications for distribution at interpretive centers and other visitation points.

Bureau of Land Management Responsibilities

Bureau of Land Management responsibilities are to take the initiative in carrying out the recommendations included in the comprehensive plans on the public lands under its jurisdiction. However, if some of those recommendations cannot be implemented, the reasons for not doing so will be made clear to the public.

The BLM is responsible for protecting and interpreting the trail resources under its jurisdiction. This management plan is being written to describe how the BLM proposes to carry out that responsibility on sites and segments of the National Historic Trails on the public lands. Specific BLM management responsibilities include the following:

1. Regularly monitoring the status of all Wyoming sites and segments identified in the comprehensive plan in order to ascertain changes in ownership or impending developments; keep NPS informed.
2. Arranging to have inventories and studies performed; seeking public access; defining boundaries; erecting and maintaining trail markers; providing and maintaining local facilities; issuing and enforcing regulations; working closely with the National Park Service, the states through which the trail passes, or other public or private interest groups; and nominating qualified sites to the National Register of Historic Places.
3. Because of the Trails' status as congressionally designated components of the National Trails System, management decisions have been made that significant segments of the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer Trails are to be protected. It is incumbent on BLM managers to maintain the scenic/historic integrity of historic sites and cross country segments on the public lands, to avoid destruction of trail resources, to mitigate unavoidable impacts, to accord the trails a priority status in the land use planning process, and generally extend to the trails the type of protection afforded to other nationally significant historic sites.

Previous BLM planning efforts have dealt with Oregon and Mormon Pioneer Trail issues. Protective measures have been prescribed within the individual districts for sites and segments on public lands. This planning effort will refine the previously established protective measures and provide uniform statewide management guidelines.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

There are over 315 miles of Oregon, Mormon Pioneer and California Emigrant, and Pony Express Trail on public lands in the State of Wyoming. With the exception of a short segment of the Pony Express route, all 315 miles are referred to as the Oregon or Mormon Trails.

The Oregon and Mormon Pioneer Trails entered the state of Wyoming along the North Platte River near Torrington. The trails followed the North Platte to the present city of Casper. From near Casper, the trails left the North Platte and head west, then southwest, ascending high hills, toward the Sweetwater River and Independence Rock.

The trails then followed the Sweetwater for ninety miles crossing it numerous times. At Burnt Ranch the trail crossed the river for the final time and the primary route headed southwest through Farson to Fort Bridger. From Fort Bridger the Oregon Trail headed north and northwest, leaving the state near Cokeville, while the Mormon Trail continued west and southwest and left Wyoming just south of the town of Evanston.

The general trail routes were originally found and used by prehistoric Native American groups. These nomadic groups utilized the natural routes along the rivers and mountain passes, mostly in search of seasonally available resources. In early historic times, Euro-American fur traders took advantage of these same routes to travel throughout the Rocky Mountain region and beyond in the pursuit of fur resources. This original fur trade route, the Platte River road, developed over the years into perhaps the most important transportation route ever used during the settlement and early development of the west. Use of the transportation route facilitated settlement of the west. The large increases in settlements in the Pacific Northwest were the single most important factor that solidified the U.S. claim to the Oregon Territory. Over the years, alternatives or cutoffs from the primary route were pioneered. These provided better roads, shorter routes, and better access to water and feed for livestock.

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Near Torrington, the primary route of the Oregon Trail was south of the North Platte River while the Mormon Trail followed the old fur trappers trace on the north side of the river near Guernsey. In addition to the primary route for the Oregon and Mormon Trails, the Plateau route lay to the south and the Childs Route of 1850 lay to the north. There were numerous short detours and bypasses in addition to these noted alternatives.

Near Casper, the Childs Route was north of the North Platte River while the primary route of the Oregon and Mormon Trails was south of the river until reaching the Mormon Ferry northeast of the city. An alternate river crossing was near the present Fort Caspar on the west end of town.

West of Casper the routes divided further. The Bessemer Bend route followed the present Highway 220 west of Casper, as did two other alternatives north of the river but south of the primary route. The primary route led generally west from present day Mills, Wyoming (a suburb of Casper) along the Poison Spider road to Emigrant Gap about nine miles west of Casper. The Bessemer Bend Route rejoins the primary route of the Oregon and Mormon Trails about seven miles southwest of Emigrant Gap. From that point for many miles only one route was utilized, with few detours and/or alternatives.

The vast majority of the routes described so far are on private or state lands. Few vestiges of the original routes remain as most have been obliterated by agricultural practices, road building, urban development, or other activities.

The primary route then led southwest through such notable landmarks as Rock Avenue, Willow Spring, and Prospect Hill to the Sweetwater River and Independence Rock, one of the most important and well known historic sites on the Oregon Trail. West of Independence Rock the land ownership pattern changes radically with the majority of the trails being on public land managed by the BLM.

Near Jeffrey City, alternatives were pioneered to bypass the primary route's three crossings of the Sweetwater. One alternative passed through present Jeffrey City while the other, the Deep Sand Route, passed the present site of the Western Nuclear Uranium Mill 1.5 miles to the north.

The next major alternative to the primary route is the Seminoe Cutoff which led south of the Sweetwater River near Sweetwater Canyon and the famous Rocky Ridges. This alternative is generally associated with the California Gold Rush and is commonly referred to as the California

Emigrant Trail. The Seminoe Cutoff rejoined the primary route near Burnt Ranch. Other minor alternatives avoided the Rocky Ridges both to the south and north of the primary trail route.

At Burnt Ranch, another major route alternative was the Lander Road. This cutoff led northwest through Sublette County, then west over the Wyoming Range in the present Bridger National Forest. It entered the Star Valley south of Smoot and left the state of Wyoming near Auburn. The Lander Road was developed by the U.S. Government to shorten the route to Oregon and to provide better forage for livestock and draft animals used in the westward migration.

In 1844, a major cutoff to the Oregon Trail was established in the Green River Basin. This became known as the Sublette Cutoff. It was first developed by Caleb Greenwood and William Sublette. Its major advantage was that it cut off the 50 to 60 mile loop to Fort Bridger, a distance equivalent to about three days' travel. As a result it was very popular with the California emigrants and the 49ers headed for the gold rush. This cutoff was noted for its lack of water and other hardships because of the desert crossing.

From Fort Bridger, the Mormon Pioneer Trail diverged from the Oregon Trail and led west-southwest through the Bridger Valley and exited Wyoming through the "Needles" south of the town of Evanston.

The Bridger Route of the Oregon Trail headed Northwest from Fort Bridger, crossing the Bear River Divide in various ways, and entered present day Idaho south of Cokeville, Wyoming. Several bypasses and detours were found along the primary route southwest of Fossil Butte National Monument.

Other lesser known alternatives include the Slate Creek Cutoff which led from the Big Sandy River east of Lombard Ferry on the Green River to the Green River at the Case-Davis Ferry near the present-day Fontenelle Dam. Others included the Kinney Cutoff which led from Lombard Ferry on the Green River to the Sublette Cutoff at Rocky Gap, and the Dempsey-Hockaday cutoff which shortened the Sublette Cutoff somewhat from Rocky Gap to a point west on the Sublette Cutoff. Table 1 lists the principle routes and cutoffs by name and general location.

Certified sites and segments of the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails are listed in Tables 2, 3, and 4. A certified site or segment of a National Historic Trail is an official designated component of the National Trail System. These, at present, are limited to sites and segments on

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**TABLE 1
ROUTE SEGMENTS AND
CUTOFFS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN**

Individual Trail Segment	Name and Location
TIR	Oregon/Mormon Trail -Torrington to Independence Rock
CR	Childs Route - Fort Laramie to Casper
SS	Sweetwater/South Pass Segment -Independence Rock to Little Sandy Crossing
LF	Lombard Ferry Segment -Little Sandy Crossing to Fort Bridger
BR	Bridger Segment - Fort Bridger to Bear River Divide
BD	Bear River Divide Segment - Bear River Divide to Idaho
MC	Mormon/California Trail Segment -Fort Bridger to Utah (Needles)
SC	Seminole Cutoff -Warm Springs to Burnt Ranch
LR	Lander Road - Burnt Ranch to Idaho State Line near Auburn
SC	Sublette Cutoff -Parting-of-the-Ways to Cokeville
KC	Kinney Cutoff -Lombard Ferry to the Slate Creek Cutoff
SL	Slate Creek Cutoff -Big Timber Station to Rocky Gap
DH	Dempsey - Hockaday Cutoff -Rocky Gap to Dempsey Ridge
BF	Blacks Fork Cutoff -Black's Fork River to Ziller Ranch

**TABLE 2
CERTIFIED HISTORIC SITES¹ AND
LANDMARKS ON THE OREGON AND
MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HISTORIC
TRAILS IN THE STATE OF WYOMING**

Name	Management Responsibility
Oregon Trail	
Emigrant Gap	BLM - Casper District
Bessemer Bend	BLM - Casper District
Devil's Gate	BLM - Rawlins District
Split Rock	BLM - Rawlins District
Ice Slough Spring	BLM - Rawlins District
Rocky Ridge	BLM - Rawlins District
South Pass	BLM - Rock Springs District
Parting-of-the-Ways	BLM - Rock Springs District
Mormon Trail	
Devil's Gate	BLM - Rawlins District
Martins Cove	BLM - Rawlins District
Split Rock	BLM - Rawlins District
Split Rock Historic Site	BLM - Rawlins District
South Pass	BLM - Rock Springs District
Parting-of-the-Ways	BLM - Rock Springs District

**TABLE 3
CERTIFIED SEGMENTS¹ OF THE OREGON
AND MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL
HISTORIC TRAILS IN THE STATE OF
WYOMING**

Name	Miles on Public Land (BLM)
Oregon Trail	
South Pass	72.0
Bear River Divide	16.0
Mormon Trail	
Fort Laramie	0.0
Independence Rock	3.5
Split Rock	1.0
South Pass	18.0
Dry Sandy	15.0
Lombard Ferry	0.0

¹ A certified segment that is an officially designated component of the National Historic Trail system designated as such when Congress adopted the NPS Comprehensive Plans.

¹ A certified site or segment that is an officially designated component of the National Historic Trail System.

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TABLE 4

**HISTORIC SITES ON THE OREGON AND
MORMON TRAILS PRESENTLY LISTED ON
THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC
PLACES**

Site Name	Ownership	Date Enrolled
Fort Laramie ¹	NPS	-
Devil's Gate ²	BLM	08/17/59
Independence Rock ²	State	07/02/61
South Pass ²	BLM	12/--/61
Oregon Trail Ruts ²	State	05/13/66
Fort Bridger	State	04/16/69
Names Hill	Private	04/16/59
Granger Stage Station	Private	02/26/70
Register Cliff	State	03/03/70
Piedmont Charcoal Kilns	Private	06/07/71
Parting-of-the-Ways	BLM	01/11/76
Johnston Scout Rocks	BLM	11/07/76
Split Rock	BLM	12/22/76
Martins Cove	BLM	03/08/77

¹National Historic Site

¹¹National Historic Landmark

public lands managed by the BLM. Sites and trail segments on state or private lands are not, at this time, part of the National Historic Trail system.

The Oregon/Mormon Trails and their cutoffs cross 345.5 miles of public lands in Wyoming. Total trail mileage, which includes State and private lands is 453 miles for the Mormon Trail in Wyoming and 495 miles for the Oregon Trail. This trails plan addresses the 345.5 miles on public lands administered by BLM. Of this 345 miles (as shown on Table 5), 41.1 miles have received cultural survey sufficient to clear development projects. The remaining 304.4 miles are unsurveyed.

There are six sites along the trails that are presently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These six sites are: Devils Gate, Martins Cove, Split Rock, South Pass. Parting-of- the Ways, and Johnston Scout Rocks. The listings for these sites have an acreage designation which cannot be related to trail mileage.

MAJOR PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

This section describes problems and issues that guide the preparation of the management plan.

1. The potential for adverse effects on private lands by public use of the Oregon and Mormon Trails is of considerable concern.
2. Trail segments and sites along the trail are being lost through inadvertent blading or other unauthorized use of trail ruts by parties working in the area.
3. Vandalism of developed historic sites and trail markers is a major concern of managing agencies and private landowners along the trail.
4. Administration/management of recreational use of the trails is difficult due to intermingled private lands, lack of access, and fragile trail resources. The BLM is faced with the task of making the trail available to the public for education, use, and enjoyment and, at the same time must ensure that the trail resources are not degraded, thus denying them for future generations to use and enjoy.
5. Management of trail segments within the three Wyoming BLM districts will be consistent with the National Trails System Act and current land use plans.

TABLE 5

**TRAIL MILEAGE ON PUBLIC
LAND BY BLM DISTRICT**

District	Miles	Miles With Cultural Survey
Casper District		
Primary Trail	29.0	3.5
Casper Total	29.0	3.5
Rawlins District		
Primary Trail	45.0	1.5
Lander Cutoff	2.0	0.0
Seminole Cutoff	23.0	0.1
Rawlins Total	70.0	1.6
Rock Springs District		
Primary Trail	109.5	17.0
Lander Cutoff	44.0	0.5
Sublette Cutoff	53.0	9.0
Kinney Cutoff	1.0	0.0
Slate Creek Cutoff	17.0	2.0
Dempsey Hockaday Cutoff	7.0	7.0
Blacks Fork Cutoff	15.0	0.5
Rock Springs Total	246.5	36.0
Total miles on public	345.5	41.1

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6. Administration of commercial and other group use on the trail is a major concern. Large groups have the potential to more adversely impact trail resources and adjacent private lands.
7. Trail resources are being lost due to natural processes of erosion.
8. Legal public access does not exist to important sites and segments of the trail.
9. There are numerous threats to the trails and associated historic sites from a variety of resource uses and development projects. Examples of these are: energy development, rights-of-way, recreational uses, and unauthorized upgrading of the trails into roads.